

a single wholly yellow feather in each of 19. Also, in about half of the 42, yellow was hidden at the base of the odd red feather.

The bird was caught in dry grassland with leafless scrub, adjoining (within 10 m) a hedge of thicket around my vegetable garden. Two had been seen at the same spot in the previous fortnight. The same bird was recaptured on 23 November 1978 in thicket 300 m from the place of first capture and weighed 8.9 g. Body plumage was still in heavy moult with the metallic feathers not fully grown. I have no other record of the species since taking up residence at Nchalo in 1973. Like *Apalis ruddi* (cf. Hanmer 1979), this may be another case of a species driven out of its normal habitat into a housing area through bush clearance.

Acknowledgements: I thank C. W. Benson for assistance in the preparation of this note. My work at Nchalo has been assisted by grants from the Frank M. Chapman Memorial Fund.

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A new northern subspecies of the Tropical Gnatcatcher *Polioptila plumbea*

by *Kenneth C. Parkes*

Received 22 January 1979

The gnatcatchers, genus *Polioptila*, constitute a New World group of uncertain affinities, generally placed as a subfamily of either the Old World warblers (Sylviidae) or the enlarged family Muscicapidae, the "Old World insect eaters," as in the "Peters" check-list. The genus is primarily tropical, with one species (*caerulea*) widespread in the United States and 2 others (*melanura* and *nigriceps*) reaching north only to the southwestern U.S., the latter having been only recently detected breeding in Arizona (Phillips *et al.* 1973). Species limits within the genus are fairly well understood, but there is one group of forms from Mexico and Central America for which the early literature is hopelessly confused and must be disregarded. The history of this confusion was well documented by Phillips (1962) and Phillips *et al.* (1973) and in both of these papers the characters and distribution of the 3 problem species *nigriceps*, *albiflora*, and *plumbea* are presented along with keys for their identification.

The most widely distributed species in the genus is the Tropical Gnatcatcher *P. plumbea* with a range extending from southern Mexico to Peru and Brazil. The northernmost populations have been confused especially with

P. albiloris, and many collections undoubtedly still contain misidentified and mislabelled specimens. After having gone over the material of this group in Carnegie Museum of Natural History, it became apparent to me that the name *Polioptila plumbea superciliaris* Lawrence, 1861, currently used for all Tropical Gnatcatchers from Mexico through Panama, applied only to the southern populations within this range, and that the northern populations constitute an unrecognized subspecies. With the help of additional specimens examined at the American Museum of Natural History, I was able to work out the respective ranges of the 2 races. The type locality of *P. p. superciliaris* is the Atlantic slope of Panama, along the Panama Railroad line. Two other names for populations of *P. plumbea* within the area under discussion have been proposed. One is *Polioptila superciliaris magna* Ridgway, 1903, for which the type locality is Cartago, Costa Rica. It was based on a single female, said to be "decidedly larger (except length of tarsus) than *superciliosa* [*sic.* = *superciliaris*]"'. Ridgway's own measurements (1904: 728-729) indicate that the holotype, with a wing length of 47.5 mm, exceeded the largest of his series of 10 female *superciliaris* by 3.5 mm, but its tail length of 43 fell well within the range of 36.5-49.5 given for *superciliaris*. The wing of the holotype of *magna* is only 0.5 mm longer than the largest Panama female of *superciliaris* I measured, and females from Costa Rica and Panama had almost identical ranges and means of wing length (Costa Rica, 44-47.5 [45.5]; Panama, 44-47 [45.25]). Ridgway also considered the holotype of *magna* to be somewhat darker than *superciliaris*, but his series of the latter was a composite, including the paler subspecies to be described below. The name *magna* is therefore considered to be a synonym of *superciliaris*.

Wetmore (1957) described as *Polioptila plumbea cinericia* the population of Isla Coiba, off the coast of Veraguas, Panama. However, he compared it only with *bilineata*, the race of northwestern South America, to which he apparently assigned mainland Panama birds. The characters described for *cinericia* are those that differentiate *superciliaris* from *bilineata*, and the single Isla Coiba specimen I examined was no darker in colour than others from the Panama mainland. A larger series from Isla Coiba may show *cinericia* to be a valid race, but this question does not affect the nomenclature of the northern population, which may be called:

***Polioptila plumbea brodkorbi* subsp. nov.**

Holotype: adult male; Carnegie Museum of Natural History No. 99884; Duck Run (also called Benque Ceiba), on the Belize River below (=east of) Cayo, western British Honduras (now Belize); 14 April 1926; collected by Ernest G. Holt; original number 1069.

Diagnosis: differs from all races of *P. plumbea* except *P. p. superciliaris* Lawrence and *P. p. bilineata* (Bonaparte) in having a white superciliary in the male; nearest in colour to *bilineata* of northwestern South America rather than to the adjacent race *superciliaris*. Both sexes differ from *bilineata* in having the dorsum somewhat purer (less brownish) grey; edgings of remiges greyer (less whitish, in this respect agreeing with *superciliaris*); white more extensive on tips of rectrices 4 and 5. Adult females have the crown darker grey, slightly glossy, contrasting more with the dorsum than in *bilineata*. Females of *bilineata* have a black spot at the edge of the crown behind the ear coverts, lacking in *brodkorbi*.

From the geographically adjacent *superciliaris*, both sexes of *brodkorbi* differ in having the underparts pure white (as in *bilineata*), not washed with blue-grey and the dorsum of a more neutral, less bluish grey. Adult males and some females in very fresh plumage have a small white spot at the tip of the central rectrices (quickly wearing away); this spot is lacking in *superciliaris*. Adult females have the crown distinctly darker than the dorsum and slightly glossy, whereas in *superciliaris* the crown is dull grey, barely if at all darker than the dorsum in well-made specimens. There are no consistent measurement differences between *brodkorbi* and *superciliaris*, as far as I can determine. First year birds (with brownish primary coverts) appear to average smaller than adults, and both the rectrices and the primaries of these tiny birds are subject to severe wear, which substantially reduces the number of accurately measurable individuals in a series. There appears to be at least a tendency for higher tail:wing ratios in northern birds; few individuals of *superciliaris* reach or exceed .900 in this ratio, whereas most individuals of *brodkorbi* exceed this figure.

Range: from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico, through the southern part of the Yucatan Peninsula, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Intergradation with *superciliaris* occurs in southwestern Nicaragua and northwestern Costa Rica. Two females (AMNH) from Los Sabalos, Nicaragua, on the San Juan River (which forms the border with Costa Rica) are intermediate, as are specimens from northern Guanacaste Province, Costa Rica. The influence of *brodkorbi* can be traced along the Pacific slope of Costa Rica as far as Orotina, about 20 km inland from the eastern shore of the Gulf of Nicoya (see map in Slud 1964), as manifested by paler underparts and less bluish upperparts than specimens from elsewhere in Costa Rica. Intergradation on the Atlantic slope must be more abrupt, as the darkest Costa Rica specimens seen are those from along the railway line ("Linea Vieja" of Slud's map) in Limon Province, northeastern Costa Rica.

Etymology: this subspecies is named for Pierce Brodkorb of the University of Florida, whose 1944 paper on *Poliioptila albiloris* was one of the first to clarify the status of the 3 problematic Central American species of gnatcatcher.

Specimens examined: *brodkorbi* - MEXICO: Oaxaca, 24 miles north of Matias Romero, 1. BELIZE: Freetown, 2; Duck Run, 1. GUATEMALA: Chimoxan, 3; Finca Chama, 3; Secanquim, 2; Vera Paz, 1; unspecified, 2. HONDURAS: San Esteban, 2; Coyoles, 1; El Boqueron, 1; Monte Redondo, 1. NICARAGUA: Matagalpa, 2; Chinandega, 1; Chontales, 1; Leon, 1; Rio Grande, 1. *brodkorbi* X *superciliaris* - NICARAGUA: Los Sabalos, 2. COSTA RICA: El Zapotal, 6; Miravalles, 3; Bebedero, 2. *superciliaris* - COSTA RICA: Boruca, 9; El Hogar, 3; El Pozo de Terraba, 3; Buenos Aires, 2; Carillo, 2; Guacimo, 2; Guapiles, 2; Aquiares, 1; Limon, 1; Orotina, 1; Pozo Azul, 1; Tuis, 1; Volcan de Osa, 1. PANAMA: Almirante, 6; Paracote, east shore Montijo Bay, 3; Chiriqui, 3; Cerro Largo, Cape Mala Peninsula, 1; Cituro, 1; Darien, 1; El Villano, 1; Isla Coiba, 1; Santa Fe, 1; unspecified, 3. *bilineata* - COLOMBIA: Fundacion, 3; Gamarra, 2; Aguachica, 1; Bonda, 1. PERU: Cartavia, 1; La Laja, 1 (plus series of *bilineata* at A.M.N.H not listed).

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Apus pacificus in the Seychelles

by C. J. Feare

Received 20 January 1979

Since 1972 swifts have been recorded in small numbers in the Seychelles and Amirantes. These have included several records of black swifts, presumed to be *Apus apus*, which species has been confirmed from specimens on Aldabra (Benson & Penny 1971, Frith 1974). There is also a record of *A. affinis*, one or two individuals having been seen in company with the indigenous *Collocalia elaphra* at Seychelles College, Mahe on 31 December 1972 (personal observations with D. E. B. Lloyd and J. High).

In addition, there have been 24 sightings of larger white-rumped swifts whose identity was obscure. From 1972 to 1976 I obtained descriptions of several individuals, sometimes seen in company with black swifts and in May 1978 I photographed two individuals on Bird Island, Seychelles. These photographs are deposited at the Museum of Zoology, Cambridge University.

All the birds were characterised by being largely dark with broad white rumps, pale chins and moderately forked tails. Two birds seen on Bird Island, Seychelles, in May 1978 at close range (c. 20 m with 8 x 30 binoculars) were black above but slightly paler below. These individuals were frequently seen in company with a Mascarene Martin *Phedina borbonica* and were estimated to be two-and-a-half to three times the size of this bird. When seen with black swifts they have appeared similar in size, larger, or slightly smaller (once). The extent of the pale chin was variable, ranging from an indistinct white chin patch, similar to some black swifts, to a larger more diffuse pale chin extending with mottling on to the upper breast. One individual had a white mark on the lower belly.

Behaviour was generally similar to black swifts, although on several occasions the wing beats of the white-rumped birds appeared noticeably slower and more laboured. The May 1978 birds, together with the *P. borbonica*, were notable in flying low over the beach and *Sterna fuscata* colony after 18.45 h when it was almost dark.

The photographs have been examined by C. W. Benson, R. K. Brooke and I. Sinclair. Brooke and Sinclair both commented that the birds were not an African species of swift. The photographs and descriptions do, however, fit the nominate race of *Apus pacificus*, the Pacific White-rumped Swift, an identification that I had tentatively proposed in 1972. Brooke and Sinclair had not seen *A. pacificus* alive and could not, therefore, confirm that the photographs were of this species, but Brooke (*in litt.* to Benson) commented that he was sure "from the evidence now available that *A. pacificus* is a regular but scarce visitor to the Seychelles". After examining skins, Benson agreed that the photographs and descriptions referred "in all probability" to nominate *A. pacificus*, and I am now confident that this is the correct identification.

A. p. pacificus is characterised by having a moderately forked tail, a broad white rump and being black apart from a pale chin and pale tips to feathers